

## II. PLANNING AND ASSESSMENT



The following chapter deals with the process of updating this document, surveying citizens about concerns and ideas, and development of the community needs assessment regarding parks and recreation in the city. The chapter is broken out into three main sections.

- A. **Plan Development Process** discusses the development of this document.
- B. **Community Input** discusses how information was gathered from the community and stakeholders in order to help identify community needs.
- C. **Needs Assessment** discusses priorities of the community in a general and city-wide sense.

### A. **PLAN DEVELOPMENT PROCESS**

Development of the updated San Antonio's Parks and Recreation System Strategic Plan (2005 – 2015) began in Spring 2004. The process was led by staff members of various divisions of the Parks and Recreation Department and involved numerous meetings of the Parks and Recreation Board as well as citizens at public meetings and other venues.

#### 1. **The Parks and Recreation Facilities and Programs Inventory**

A critical element in determining system-wide needs is an up-to-date and complete inventory of all public park and recreation facilities in Bexar County. Inventories from the 1999 Plan were updated, including properties of the City of San Antonio, 22 other incorporated cities, Bexar County, San Antonio River Authority, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, National Park Service, and City Public Service. Existing inventories of parks and specific facilities within parks were updated using site visits, especially for those parks where capital projects were completed since 1999. The compiled inventory data may be found in both Chapter IV and the individual Subarea sections in Chapter VII.

Because the Parks and Recreation System Strategic Plan is a comprehensive document addressing both facilities and programs, an update of the city's current recreation programs was also completed. In this way, the plan goes beyond Texas Parks and Wildlife Department planning process requirements which generally focus only on facilities and land. This approach is essential for San Antonio's parks and recreation system in order to present a balanced plan that addresses the complex local relationship of facilities and programs. The inventory of recreation programs currently offered by the City of San Antonio is found in Chapter IV.

#### 2. **Establishing Strategic Initiatives**

To establish Strategic Initiatives, the goals and objectives of the 1999 Parks and Recreation System Plan were examined to determine which still remained valid. These goals and objectives were then combined with current issues and initiatives identified by departmental staff to produce draft Strategic Initiatives. Following a series of public meetings held to gather citizen input about the future of the parks and recreation system, the draft Strategic Initiatives were revised. As presented in this plan in Chapter V, the Strategic Initiatives address facilities, operations, and programs. They acknowledge the scope and complexity of the City of San Antonio's parks and recreation system, the need to expand and adapt the system to meet expanding community needs, and the importance of achieving these goals in partnership with other public and private entities. The Strategic Initiatives have been reformatted to match the goals and objectives stated for the Department in the annual budget documents.

#### 3. **Classifying Park Facilities and Recreation Programs**

To assist in studying San Antonio's parks and recreation system, each park and facility type and recreation program is assigned a classification type consistent with the 1999 System Plan. Park classifications are generally based on size, use, and type of facilities within that park. Nine categories of park land are defined. Information on the classification of facilities and programs is discussed in Chapter III.

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### 4. Identifying Needs

Because cities are so diverse in size and characteristics, it is difficult to define a standard to judge the exact extent to which a parks and recreation system meets the needs of its users. In the past, a commonly used park standard was defined by the number of acres per 1,000 residents. In 1999 the goal ratio as established and recommended by The National Recreation and Parks Association was 10 acres per 1,000 residents. The NRPA has since dropped this recommendation and at this time does not issue a recommended standard ratio.

In order to place some sort of ratio or measurement to our Parks system, some benchmark had to be used for this updated plan. There is a need to determine if our parks meet a national average of other cities of the same size or even other cities in general. The Department has opted to use a document published by The Trust for Public Land called "The Excellent Park System". This document presents research and survey results of cities across the country. Cities were grouped according to population density with an average of acres per 1,000 residents. The City of San Antonio falls within the "Medium-Low Population Density" grouping, who's average of those cities is 19.1 acres per 1,000 residents. The total for all cities in the national survey is 16.2 acres per 1,000 residents. For the purposes of this document, the department will use the 16 (rounded) acres per 1,000 residents as a baseline measurement of our system. This plan references the 16:1,000 standard for the city as a whole and each planning subarea, and makes recommendations for the acreage acquisition roughly based on this ratio.

It must be understood that the 16:1,000 acreage ratio accumulates all park acreage and does not differentiate between a neighborhood park, sports facility, or open space acreage. It also does not take into account which entity owns or operates the property nor does it include any privately owned parks. Though this comparative measure can be instructive and serve as a guide, it is important to judge the unique needs of San Antonio as a whole, as well as each of its 10 planning subareas, when planning for future park and recreation facilities and programs. Using the park facilities inventory and city and subarea population estimates for 2005, 2010, and 2015, a ratio of park land per 1,000 residents was calculated for each of those three years.

While the acreage ratio comparison has been used in the past on parkland, current national planning standards are now deviating from such a uniform measurement. Distance from a park facility, time (walking) to a park facility, access to non-governmental facilities, and expenditure per resident on parks and programs are a few of the benchmarks being evaluated in certain circumstances. Additional means of measuring service to San Antonio residents may be more appropriate in future updates of this document.

Complicating the assessment of how well San Antonio meets its residents' needs is the lack of generally accepted benchmarks used to judge recreational facilities and programming. The Texas Outdoor Recreation Plan (TORP), issued by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department in 1990, attempted to measure recreational facilities and programming throughout 24 statewide planning areas. The TORP judged facilities, the existence of a park land dedication ordinance, and level of funding. The performance of cities was ranked based on statewide averages for these measures. When compared with other Texas cities at the time, San Antonio ranked low in number of recreational acres and facilities, and the plan recommended that the City adopt a voluntary park dedication program for developers and enter into partnerships with private organizations to acquire additional land. Because the TORP has not been updated recently, current comparative data is not available.

While the measures used in the TORP are quantitative, it is also important to weigh other factors when developing recreational facilities and programs. In order to plan wisely for future parks and recreation facilities and programs, it is important to understand the demographics and social profile of the community to be served. The 2002 Park Police Performance Review, the National Golf Foundation Report, and the After School and Summer Program Monitoring Standards all provide comprehensive recommendations to address needs in the community and the organization. By identifying specific factors, the Parks and Recreation Department, through its facilities and programs and in partnership with other departments and agencies, can establish a more integrated approach to serving community needs.

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### 5. Recommendations

Development of future park and recreation facilities and programs is based on indicators of need. Recommendations address the unique needs of each part of the city (subarea), taking into account current service levels and facilities, demographics, social statistics, natural resource assets, and needs expressed by subarea residents.

### 6. Plan Implementation

General guidelines to prioritize recommendations for future development of facilities and programs were established based on public input, the extent and condition of current facilities, and demographics. The recommendations were then prioritized by year through 2015 and this information is presented in a later chapter entitled Plan Implementation (Chapter VIII).

## **B. COMMUNITY INPUT**

Two processes were used to solicit information from citizens about their interest and participation in San Antonio's parks and recreation facilities and programs. A formal survey of recreation activities was conducted by an outside consultant in 1996, and results of this survey appear to remain valid in many regards. In addition, ten public meetings were held in April and May of 2004, one in each of the ten planning subareas defined for the System Plan. These meetings provided residents the opportunity to share information and provide input about their specific planning subareas. Ten additional meetings were held in March of 2005.

The 1996 study of the City's recreation functions was designed to assist the Department in formulating goals and policies for its recreation programs. Adults and high school students were surveyed using questions about use of discretionary time, existing and future recreation facilities and programs, public outreach, and ways to improve service. The highest level of interest was expressed in lighted sports fields, hike/bike trails, and equipped playgrounds. Preferences were also expressed for new aquatic facilities and multi-purpose centers for indoor recreational activities. Respondents also indicated the need for better marketing of department activities, safety and security at department facilities, modern equipment, better maintenance of facilities, and equitable recreation opportunities. It appears from current surveys and discussions that these interests and concerns are still very valid today.

The twenty public input meetings held in 2004 and 2005 provided staff members from various Divisions (Park Projects, Park Maintenance, Recreation, and Park Police) the opportunity to personally visit with citizens. Participants were asked to provide information about their facility and program preferences using a paper survey. Additional verbal and written comments were also solicited, and participants were urged to ask other interested individuals to submit their comments to the Parks and Recreation Department. At each of the public meetings the paper surveys were handed out and they were also placed at the city community centers. The survey was also available on the department's website.

Though not scientific, responses indicated that the public's number one interest was hike and bike trails, especially in natural settings (natural areas and greenways). Public meeting participants also expressed a strong interest in individual and informal group pursuits as opposed to more organized, formal recreation activities. Participants strongly supported a wide variety of youth sports facilities and programs. Results of the 2004 survey included alternative and nontraditional types of facilities and programs not mentioned in the 1999 planning process. Examples of facilities include skate parks, bmx bike facilities, dog parks, climbing walls, and disc golf courses. The survey indicated that upgrades of existing facilities were important in certain areas of town inside Loop 410, while acquisition of park land was important in rapidly growing sectors of the city outside Loop 410 and Loop 1604. These variations between 1999 and 2004 survey results underscore the need to update the Strategic Plan every two years to measure ongoing changes in community desires, priorities, and needs.

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Responses received to the paper and website survey and public meeting input have all been considered in assessing city-wide and subarea needs and in formulating recommendations. The ten public input meetings, one in each subarea, held in March 2005 were to review the proposals and to verify with the community, the specific recommendations.

### C. NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Every city's need for park land and recreational facilities and programs is unique and the means of meeting those needs vary widely. San Antonio, like most metropolitan areas, has several public entities that provide facilities and programs. Each metropolitan area, however, is unique in the level of facilities and programs offered by its various providers. This factor complicates comparisons with other park systems in Texas and the United States.

Because San Antonio residents comprise over 83% of Bexar County's population, it is not surprising that the City is looked to as the primary provider of park and recreation facilities and programs in this area. However, because of the extensive, more populous metropolitan area surrounding San Antonio, other governmental and private sector entities also play an important role in meeting the citizen's park and recreation needs. As the population continues to grow, cooperation with non-City providers will become increasingly important.

#### 1. Need for Facilities

One means of addressing need is to use the aforementioned Trust for Public Land's "The Excellent City Park System" national average of 16 acres of park land per 1,000 residents. For this plan, calculations of City of San Antonio park land per 1,000 residents have been made based on the City's estimated 2005, 2010, and 2015 populations and June 2005 park acreage total. Another set of calculations takes into consideration other public park lands, and a third calculation includes three metropolitan-based parks (Braunig Lake, Calaveras Lake, and Government Canyon State Natural Area) as well as city natural areas that are currently inaccessible to the public. The ratios are stated to demonstrate the growth in acreage-based need as the population increases. The same calculations were made for each planning subarea and are included in subsequent subarea chapters.

	June 2005 Inventory	Current Service Ratio	2005 est. pop 1,282,800		2010 est. pop 1,370,400		2015 est. pop 1,454,100	
			<i>Need</i>	<i>Exc./Def.*</i>	<i>Need</i>	<i>Exc./Def.*</i>	<i>Need</i>	<i>Exc./Def.*</i>
City of S.A. acres	16,100	12.55:1,000	20,525	-4,425	21,926	-5,826	23,266	-7,166
All public recreation acres except lakes, Govt. Canyon SNA, and Undeveloped Natural Areas	11,420	8.90:1,000	20,525	-9,105	21,926	-10,506	23,266	-11,846
All public park acres including lakes, and Govt. Canyon SNA, and Undeveloped Natural Areas	23,178	18.07:1,000	20,525	+2,653	21,926	+1,252	23,266	-88

\* denotes excess or deficit of acres as compared with service goal of 16 acres per 1,000 residents.

While facilities such as Braunig and Calaveras Lakes, Government Canyon State Natural Area, and the city's undeveloped natural areas provide city residents with a large surplus of park land, they are inaccessible for many residents and serve very specialized needs or purposes such as boating, fishing, hiking, and horseback riding, or in the case of the natural areas, protecting sensitive environments. Careful attention must therefore be paid to serving the majority of residents by providing quality neighborhood and community parks, sports complexes, greenways, and recreation programs that address more urgent urban needs.

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It is important that the City of San Antonio continue to assure that other large recreation facilities in the metropolitan area like those mentioned above be made available and accessible to the public. Though the City of San Antonio will develop facilities (in the future) to serve both local, urban, and more general metropolitan needs, it will increasingly need to rely on cooperation with other public and private interests. The need for collaboration with other entities is dictated by shared needs and limited financial and physical resources of all area agencies.

One clear example of the need and opportunity for collaboration is the identification, evaluation, and preservation of parkland resources in the city and the region. For example, floodplains such as Leon and Salado Creeks and the San Antonio River have tremendous potential to be developed as multi-purpose linear greenways reaching into every sector of the community. They can be used not only to improve drainage and protect health, safety, and welfare, but to provide additional parks, hike and bike trails, and increased recreational opportunities, as well as to protect natural plant communities and wildlife habitat. In this way, floodplains can improve overall community aesthetics, link neighborhoods and public facilities, provide for multiple public uses, and assist with the cleaning of our air and water. The integration of drainage with parkland development will continue to require close cooperation between city departments, other public agencies, and private organizations and land owners. If successful, San Antonio will be a safer, more attractive, and livable community because of it.

When assessing the current ability of San Antonio's parks and recreation system to serve the community's needs, it is useful, though not fully conclusive, to compare the City's existing park acres per 1,000 residents to similar ratios for other major cities. It is important to remember that while other cities may have more park acres area-wide, it is the type of park land (i.e. neighborhood parks, greenways, etc.) and geographic distribution that helps determine if a community is adequately served. It is important to note that many cities calculate large tracts of inaccessible conservation land and large lakes and reservoirs in their park land inventory. Therefore, comparisons between cities must take this into account.

The chart below compares San Antonio with six other Texas cities and twenty-one municipalities throughout the nation in the number of park acres owned and/or managed. Included is other parkland owned by county, metropolitan, State, and Federal agencies within the boundary of the specific city. In some cases, city government is not the primary provider of local park lands. The data is the most recently available from the Trust for Public Land (2003).

### Texas Cities

<u>City</u>	<u>Population</u>	<u>Park Acres</u>	<u>Park Acres/1,000 Residents</u>
El Paso	564,000	26,372	46.80
Austin	707,604	16,814	23.76
Ft. Worth	535,000	10,554	19.70
Dallas	1,189,000	21,670	18.20
<b>San Antonio</b>	<b>1,145,000</b>	<b>16,503</b>	<b>14.40</b>
Arlington	333,000	4,151	12.50
Houston	1,954,000	21,252	10.90

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### Selected United States Cities Outside Texas

<u>City</u>	<u>Population</u>	<u>Park Acres</u>	<u>Park Acres/1,000 Residents</u>
San Diego, CA	1,223,000	38,993	31.90
Kansas City, MO	442,000	13,782	31.20
Oklahoma City, OK	506,000	14,684	29.00
Phoenix, AZ	1,321,000	36,944	28.00
Virginia Beach, VA	425,000	11,258	26.50
Portland, OR	529,000	12,959	24.50
Cincinnati, OH	331,000	7,000	21.10
Honolulu, HI	876,000	17,538	20.00
Memphis, TN	650,000	10,490	16.10
Minneapolis, MN	383,000	5,694	14.90
<b>San Antonio</b>	<b>1,145,000</b>	<b>16,503</b>	<b>14.40</b>
Las Vegas, NV	478,000	5,416	11.30
New Orleans, LA	485,000	5,228	10.80
Seattle, WA	563,000	6,024	10.70
Sacramento, CA	407,000	3,694	9.10
Atlanta, GA	416,000	3,235	7.80
Philadelphia, PA	1,518,000	10,621	7.00
Tucson, AZ	487,000	3,175	6.50
Detroit, MI	951,000	5,890	6.20
Long Beach, CA	462,000	2,792	6.00
Fresno, CA	428,000	1,323	3.10

\* Source: The Trust for Public Land, "The Excellent City Park System", Peter Harnick, 2003.

### 2. Need For Programs

While the comparison of population and park acreage serves as a guide to determining need for facilities, the need for programming is complicated by many factors. It is here that the profile of community residents including age, income, and ethnicity plays a significant role. When these population statistics are combined with social statistics such as educational level, juvenile arrests, and births to young and/or single mothers, a profile emerges of needs that should be addressed as much as practicable through city programs. Using this profile, existing and proposed facilities and programs can be studied to assure that they meet these community needs.

It is important to note that typical park system plans in this country have been centered solely on physical needs based on numerical standards. This has been true in San Antonio's previous park system plans as well. The Parks and Recreation System Strategic Plan, however, is based on the premise that physical improvements, including park acquisition and facilities' development, can only be planned and recommended if the programmatic needs of the community are identified first.

Physical improvements are primarily funded through capital campaigns and general bond issues, whereas maintenance of those physical improvements, policing, and program development are primarily funded through annual operating budgets. This interrelationship of funding is critical to the viability and sustainability of all facilities and their related programs.

Additionally, all programs offered, or to be offered, by the City of San Antonio do not require a typical community center or recreation facility to be successful. Programs such as the Roving Leader program are "mobile" and can be offered at a variety of sites including city parks, private neighborhood centers, schools, and churches. The dependence on a fixed facility and its related operation and maintenance costs can be lessened using this approach.

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The City is currently expanding the availability of facilities and programs historically perceived as “inaccessible”, such as golf courses and tennis centers. Creating sustainable activities for low income and non-traditional users of such facilities, especially youth who live near the facilities, will remain a high priority. Access to other traditionally non-urban activities such as hiking, boating, and fishing must also be pursued. These activities should also be made available through existing facilities, such as golf course parking areas for trail heads, public pools for snorkeling and scuba diving training, etc...